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Guidance

Help secondary school children continue their education during coronavirus (COVID-19)

Advice for parents and carers supporting the home learning of secondary school children (year 7 to 11).

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Department for Education (<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-education>)

Applies to:

England

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From the week beginning 1 June 2020 at the earliest, we'll be asking secondary schools to offer some face-to-face support to supplement the remote education of year 10 children who are due to take GCSEs next year.

Vulnerable children and the children of critical workers continue to be eligible to attend, and we encourage them to do so where appropriate. Other children will continue to be supported to learn at home. Further information on which children can attend school

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/closure-of-educational-settings-information-for-parents-and-carers/reopening-schools-and-other-educational-settings-from-1-june>) is available.

While staying at home due to coronavirus, parents and carers may be concerned about their children's education and the effect of missing school. Parents of year 11 students may also be worried about GCSEs and their child moving on to the next stage in life.

No one expects parents to act as teachers, or to provide the activities and feedback that a school would. Speak to your school – your child's education is still their responsibility and they should be planning:

- achievable work for your child to do
- ways to give them feedback on their work
- ways to check on their overall progress

Schools are working quickly to adapt to the current situation, producing new materials and ways of teaching. If you have any concerns about your child's education or how work is being set for them, do not hesitate to speak to the school and let them know.

This is a difficult time, and parents and carers should just do their best to support children in doing the work school sets for them.

Alongside any work your child receives from school, you can also use these online educational resources (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-online-education-resources/coronavirus-covid-19-list-of-online-education-resources-for-home-education>). These have been recommended by teachers and school leaders.

Educational programmes to help children learn at home are available from BBC Bitesize (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/>).

You can also call Starline (<https://www.starline.org.uk/>) on 0330 313 9162. This free helpline is providing support and advice to parents on home learning during the coronavirus outbreak.

Help your child organise their time

Do not worry about trying to maintain the full routine your child had at school. Their school will be planning an achievable amount of work for them to do at home. This may include:

- work to be handed in by a set time, like homework
- some online teaching sessions

Schools may give you advice on how to structure the day and your child may need some support to organise their time.

You know them best – it may suit them to split work up into shorter tasks or vary the different types of activity. Encourage them to take breaks and make time to be active – see physical activity resources for secondary school children (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-online-education-resources/coronavirus-covid-19-list-of-online-education-resources-for-home-education#pe-and-physical-activity-secondary>) to do at home.

Try different ways of working, not just using digital devices, for example:

- use books, textbooks and other printed materials that their school has provided or that you already have at home
- complete some work by hand – write a diary, a summary of things they have learned each day, or 'to do' lists

It may be difficult to keep your child motivated or for them to complete all the work school sets them. Do your best to support them and if they're having problems completing their work, contact the school to discuss it with them.

Using digital devices for schoolwork

Your child's school may be setting them work to do on a digital device such as a laptop. If you do not have a device they can use, contact the school. Some schools may be able to provide a device for them or, if not, they should provide the work in a different format so your child can access it.

Set age-appropriate parental controls on any devices your child uses and try to monitor the websites and apps they're using. See advice on keeping them safe online

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-keeping-children-safe-online/coronavirus-covid-19-support-for-parents-and-carers-to-keep-children-safe-online>) and talk to your child about online safety.

Screen time

More screen time is expected while children are continuing their education and socialising from home. Help your child to spend time away from screens by suggesting breaks or other activities, such as phone calls, reading books, or doing exercise, while following the rules on social distancing (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/staying-alert-and-safe-social-distancing>).

If you can, get them to stop using digital devices at least an hour before bed.

Socialising while social distancing

Children may be missing socialising with others at school. Let your child speak to their friends and family members through phone or video calls.

Many children will be socialising online too. See advice on keeping them safe online (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-keeping-children-safe-online/coronavirus-covid-19-support-for-parents-and-carers-to-keep-children-safe-online>) and advice from the NSPCC about gaming (<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/online-games/>) if they're socialising through online games. Set age-appropriate parental controls on any devices they use and ask them to tell you if they see anything worrying online.

Schools may also be looking into ways they can help children socialise and discuss things as they would at school.

Mental health and wellbeing

Staying at home and the change of routine may make this a difficult time for some children. They might show feelings of worry or frustration. It's understandable and many families will be experiencing this.

Try to limit the time they spend watching the news if it upsets them. Take time to reassure them and be open to talking about their feelings.

This may be a particularly difficult time for year 11 children who have worked hard towards exams that will not now take place and are missing end of school celebrations. Make time to talk to them about it if they need to and acknowledge that they'll probably have a range of feelings about it.

YoungMinds (<https://youngminds.org.uk/>) provide help and advice on mental health for both children and their parents.

You can also read our advice on how to support your child's wellbeing (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-supporting-children-and-young-peoples-mental-health-and-wellbeing>), which includes places to find information and help.

Guidance is also available to help you look after your own mental health (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-public-on-mental-health-and-wellbeing>).

Talking to your child about coronavirus

Coronavirus can be a difficult thing to talk to children about and you may be worried about upsetting them. However, ignoring the subject could upset them more. Be open to talking to them about it.

You know your child best and conversations will be different depending on their age.

Try to reassure them that:

- you're doing your best to keep them safe and well
- they're unlikely to become seriously ill and that you'll care for them if they do
- if you or other family members are ill they'll be cared for too
- this situation is only temporary

Let them know it's OK to be worried – do not dismiss their concerns or tell them how to feel about it.

Answer the questions they asked, or if you do not know the answer tell them that you do not.

Be truthful and get your information from reliable sources such as GOV.UK (<http://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>) or the NHS (<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>).

Talking about their feelings is a healthy thing to do and will help your child's mental health and wellbeing.

What schools are doing

One of the responsibilities of schools is to provide pastoral care – the support they give children to help them to develop socially, academically, and personally. Schools are considering how to provide this in the current situation and many are checking in on children's wellbeing and safety.

They'll be contacting some children more, such as those who are vulnerable or those who are not completing work or replying to emails from teachers.

Schools are also considering how to provide extra support to children who will find it harder to learn at home or are making the least progress. This could include children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/help-children-with-send-continue-their-education-during-coronavirus-covid-19>), children who receive free school meals, and children who have a social worker.

If you feel that you need some more support, contact your child's school.

Year 7 to year 9 students

Follow any advice from your child's school on:

- what work they should be doing

- what work is most important
- when work needs to be completed and handed in

The best way to help children aged 11 to 14 learn is to:

- agree what they should try to achieve each day and each week
- try to help them balance any deadlines for when work has to be handed in
- try to break down the work into shorter periods, based on how long they can concentrate
- take frequent breaks
- praise or reward them when they do well
- make some time for practical activities, such as arts and crafts, exercise or helping with cooking

Ask them about what they've learned, or try a quiz from BBC Bitesize (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/>).

Make time each day for them to read things that interest them, not just the reading they have to do for school. This could be books or articles, fiction or non-fiction. Talk to them about what they're reading to encourage their interest.

Libraries are currently closed, but you can find digital services they're providing at Libraries Connected (<https://www.librariesconnected.org.uk/page/librariesfromhome>).

Year 10 students

Parents may be worried about how the current situation will affect GCSE exams next year. We're working on ways to support year 10 students, including asking secondary schools to offer some face-to-face support to supplement remote education. Further information will be provided shortly.

In the meantime, your child should keep studying at home for the exams next year. To support them, follow any advice from their school on:

- what work they should be doing
- what work is most important, particularly subjects that have coursework or are assessed during the year
- when work needs to be completed and sent back

The best way to help children aged 14 to 15 learn is to:

- help them create a daily schedule for any work they've been set
- try to help them balance any deadlines for when work has to be handed in
- give them access to a computer or another digital device if they need it to complete their work – if one is not available, contact their school
- take frequent breaks

Ask them about what they've learned, or try a quiz from BBC Bitesize (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/>).

Make time each day for them to read things that interest them, not just the reading they have to do for school. Talk to them about what you're both reading. This could be books or articles, fiction or non-fiction.

Libraries are currently closed, but you can find digital services they're providing at Libraries Connected (<https://www.librariesconnected.org.uk/page/librariesfromhome>).

Year 11 students

To prevent the spread of coronavirus, we've had to cancel GCSE exams this year.

A new system has been put in place to award GCSE grades that reflect all the hard work children have done.

Teachers will give each of their pupils an assessed grade for each of their subjects, based on how they expect they would have done if they had sat exams. The schools will then rank their pupils within each subject and grade.

Schools will send this information to the exam boards who will standardise the grades across schools to make sure no school is being too harsh or too lenient. Ofqual, the exams regulator, will oversee this process to make sure it's fair.

GCSE results will be published on Thursday 20 August 2020.

See the full information on how Ofqual will award GCSE grades

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/awarding-qualifications-in-summer-2020>), including a letter to children explaining the situation to them.

There will be an appeal process for anyone who thinks the process has been applied unfairly.

If you and your child feel that their grade does not reflect their ability, they'll be able to sit exams this autumn or in summer 2021.

Read advice for parents of children in other age groups (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/supporting-your-childrens-education-during-coronavirus-covid-19#advice-on-helping-children-continue-their-education-during-coronavirus>).

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Explore the topic

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- Education and childcare during coronavirus (<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus-taxon/education-and-childcare>)